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AUTHOR Seely, Johnathan F.
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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the term "ergative" and traces the history of this and related terms and concepts in descriptive linguistics. Early attempts at defining the ergative illustrate the preoccupation with its supposedly passive nature. Other questions include the simple identification of the ergative, co-occurring cases, supposed ergative pasts of nominative-accusative languages, histories of ergative languages, and various types of ergativity. In the West, interest in the ergative was accompanied by confusion with the "absolutive" or "nominative" case and the "neutral" case. Another prevalent idea was that the ergative was causative in nature. Still another association was that of ergative languages with primitive cultures and inferior mentalities. This in turn led to the belief that language evolved from ergative-absolutive to nominative-accusative. As one possible solution to the confusion accompanying the concept of ergative, the term "near ergative" or "semantic ergative" is suggested for languages in which the "subject" case is semantically determined. In turn this semantic ergative may be split according to certain syntactic criteria. (AM)

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Jonathan Seely

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The term 'ergative'

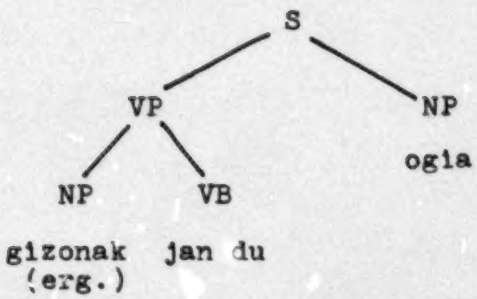
The most widely accepted definition of 'ergative' is that of a grammatical case, the subject of a transitive verb, wherein that case is opposed to a second case, the 'absolutive' ('nominative'), which includes both the subject of an intransitive verb and the object of a transitive. The ergative case thus implies a distinction or lack of association between the subject of an intransitive and the subject of a transitive. The ergative case is often used elsewhere---in many languages it appears in instrumental, genitive, and locative contexts. An 'ergative construction' is most commonly thought of as a necessarily transitive sentence containing the ergative case, whereas, unfortunately so, 'ergative language' has been on occasion applied to any language containing the ergative case.

The term 'ergative' appears to have been coined by Adolf Dirr (at least as early as 1912:9) from the Greek 'ἔργον,' meaning 'work' or 'deed,' and it is thus semantically similar to the terms 'operative' and 'agentive.' It should be pointed out that the term has nothing to do with the notions of 'subject,' 'nominative,' 'active,' or 'transitive.' Languages most commonly cited as 'ergative' or containing 'ergative constructions' include Basque, Eskimo, most languages from the Caucasus and from Australia, some Polynesian languages, Burushaski (an isolate in northern Pakistan), the Paleosiberian languages, Sumerian, Hurrian,

some Papuan languages (e.g., Kâte and Ono), Tibetan, Indic languages, and many American Indian languages (e.g., from Siouan, Mayan, Iroquoian).

In spite of the familiarity of the term 'ergative' today, it is still not in common usage in connection with the descriptive terminology of some ergative languages. The opposing case, the 'absolutive' (the term was introduced by Thalbitzer in 1911 in connection with Eskimo) has not been as widely accepted, and its popularity is shared with the term 'nominative.' Although according to the Latin definition 'nominative' is not incorrect, Meščaninov 1967 suggested that it is inappropriately used as the case opposed to ergative, since the former does not convey the corresponding concept found in the nominative-accusative system. Indeed, the absolutive, since it is also the object of a transitive verb, is an integral part of the ergative system, and the intransitive sentence cannot include the Western Indo-European notion of nominative. The term 'absolutive' is thus preferred in order to eliminate any connotation of the nominative-accusative distinction in languages considered as having that typology.

As a language typology it is unfortunate that the ergative-absolutive language is held in direct contrast with the nominative-accusative. In attempting to save the standard theory de Rijk 1966 suggested the following tree showing the PS rules S → NP + VP and VP → VB + NP. The Basque sentence we will use here is 'gizonak (the man) ogia jan du' ('the man has eaten the bread'):



In the above tree the 'subject' (as the sentence customarily would be translated into English) is placed under the VP node. Such a model is in frequent usage; the standard theory has been saved; and all any linguist is required to do in sitting down with his informant is to decide whether the verb should be thrown in with the 'object' (nominative-accusative) or with the 'subject' (ergative-absolutive). The language is then designated as 'active' or 'passive' respectively.

Historiography of nomenclature

The above polarity is a relic in a history of attempts to characterize the ergative. A review of the terms used prior to the popularization of 'ergative' portrays the variety of attitudes concerning the nature of the ergative construction. In Eskimo, Fabricius (1801:78-79) had used the terms 'Nominativus intransitivus' as opposed to 'Nominativus transitivus'; Kleinschmidt 1851 introduced 'subjective' (ergative) and 'objective.' In 1924 Jespersen (1965:166) in his discussion of Eskimo spoke of the 'casus passivus' or 'casus intransitivus' as opposed to the 'casus activus' or 'casus transitivus.' Terms still popular in descriptions of Eskimo were introduced by Thalbitzer (1930:324): 'absolutive,' 'exclusive and balanced like a ball' versus the 'relative'

(ergative), which 'implies a relation of dependency or superiority.'

Uhlenbeck (1916:213-214) in his famous article on American Indian 'passives' used 'casus energeticus' or 'casus emanativus' (ergative) as opposed to the 'casus inertiae.' Some grammarians have used simply 'Nominative I' and 'Nominative II' (Strehlow 1942-1944 in his grammar of Aranda). Much Mayan literature describes ergative and absolutive in terms of merely, respectively, 'set A' and 'set B' (in speaking of the pronominal sets). In his grammar of Gumbáiŋgar, Smythe (1948:153) used the term 'operative' (ergative) as opposed to the 'radical' or 'objective.' As late as 1963 Holmer in his survey of Australian languages preferred 'agentive' as opposed to 'objective' (1963:59-61). Chafe 1970a, applying semantic case terminology to Onondaga, used 'agent' and 'patient.'

Lorimer 1935-1936 in his Burushaski grammar used 'transitive nominative and agential' (ergative) and 'nominative, vocative, and accusative.' In respect to Tibetan and Australian languages von der Gabelentz (1891:161) spoke of the 'Casus activo-instrumentalis' and 'Casus neutro-passivus.' Lafitte, the famous Basque grammarian, called the ergative the 'cas actif,' yet avoided the active-passive controversy with his definition: 'sujet de verbe transitif ou complément d'agent d'un verbe passif' (1962:55).

Mention should be made of the terms 'actor-construction' ('kartari prayoga') versus 'goal construction' ('karmaṇi prayoga') of the Indian grammarians (W. Matthews 1953:399).

The former denotes the nominative-accusative construction of the present tense; the 'goal-construction' is characteristic of the ergative construction found in the past tense. Verb agreement is thus respectively with the 'subject' and 'object.' Müller 1887 in his survey of Basque and Caucasian languages used 'Instrumental' and on occasion 'Instruktif' to denote the ergative; for the absolutive he used 'Nominative-Accusative.'

Studies of especially the languages of the Caucasus provoked the earliest discussions on the nature of the ergative. Vogt 1942 gives a résumé of early scholarship on the Caucasian languages, of which the most exhausting survey---35 languages---was that of Dirr 1928, who only at that time popularized the term 'ergative.' In Baron Uslar's extensive research in the late 19th century and in the numerous résumés of his work by Schiefner, the term 'Instruktif' was used. Brosset (1837, a grammar of Georgian) preferred 'demonstrative.' One previous term to denote the ergative was Georgian 'mothchrobithi,' translated as 'narrative' (in Georgian the case appears only in the past tense) and still used by Vogt 1938 in his Georgian grammar.

A survey of terms used is presented accordingly:

Ergative	Absolutive
energetic/emanating	inertia
transitive-nominative	intransitive-nominative
operative	radical/ objective
instrumental	nominative/ accusative
narrative	nominative
instructive	nominative
agential	objective
relative	absolutive
subjective	objective
agent	object/ patient
active-instrumental	neutral-passive
demonstrative	

Historiography of 'ergative' and 'absolutive'/'nominative'

Although first introduced in Dirr 1912, as mentioned above the term 'ergative' was only popularized by Dirr 1928. Although W. Matthews (1953:391) attributed its coinage to the latter date, Trombetti 1923 had nevertheless used 'ergativo' consistently in his 'Elementi di glottologia.' The term was mentioned by Trubetzkoy 1929 and in the 1930s was used by Lafon 1930 (with Basque) and Dumézil (beginning with his work on Ubykh in 1931). The first dictionary entry was in Marouzeau's second edition (1943:89) of the 'Lexique de la terminologie linguistique,' in which 'ergative' was defined as the:

> Cas désignant l'agent dans les langues comme le basque où les verbes correspondant pour le sens aux transitifs des langues indo-européennes sont en fait des passifs. Dans l'énoncé correspondant à 'l'homme achète une maison,' 'maison' se met au nominatif, et 'l'homme' à l'ergatif.

Such a definition is illustrative of the preoccupation with the supposedly passive nature of the ergative---a debate which lasted a good fifty years and which perhaps has still not ended.

Bokarev 1950 edited in Russian translation a collection of articles which had examined the active-passive debate, articles by Schuchardt (who in 1896 had started the debate), Uhlenbeck, Finck, Trombetti, Sommerfelt, and Schnorr von Carolsfeld among others. In Leningrad in December of 1964 there was a conference devoted to ergativity (Gecadze and Žukova 1965). The result was a number of papers edited by Žirmunskij 1967. Questions raised included the simple identification of the ergative, the number of co-occurring cases, supposed ergative pasts of nominative-accusative languages, histories of ergative languages, the various types of ergativity, co-occurrence of ergative and nominative-accusative systems, even the history of thought in respect to ergativity, and of course again the active-passive debate. The majority of papers were on the languages of the Caucasus; there were a few on Indo-European[1] and also on the general characteristics of the ergative; there were none on Basque or on the languages of the Americas.

In Western circles interest in ergativity was rekindled by Fillmore 1966a, who unfortunately at the time confused many persons as to just what the ergative was. Since to him 'ergative' was more connotative of the system, he used the term to describe the case which more commonly had been called the 'absolutive' or 'nominative.'[2] In a presentation at Georgetown of essentially

[1]For the most recent résumé and hypothesis on the question of a PIE ergative see Rumsey 1975.

[2]In the Reibel and Schane edition of this paper (1969:364) the terminology was improved by the substitution of the term 'objective.'

the same paper (1966b:21) Fillmore used 'ergative' to describe 'the relation between the subject of an intransitive verb and the object of a transitive; [thus the verb] "open" requires an ergative, tolerates an instrumental . . . .' [He did admit in a footnote that 'slight violence is done to traditional terminology' (1966b:32).] The misnomer was also corrected in 'The case for case,' wherein he noted that 'the neutral case [had been] unwisely and misleadingly labeled "ergative"' (1968:25).

Behind Fillmore's mislabeling lay the idea that the ergative construction was causative in nature. Thus, 'he opened the door' is derived from 'he made the door open.' This concept of ergative was picked up by Halliday (1967:15), who distinguished 'transitive' and 'ergative' respectively as 'action and goal' and 'cause and effect.'

Lyons 1968 also used 'ergative' as causative. The subject of 'John moved the stone' is responsible for the action, 'the stone moved,' and there is thus an 'ergative relationship' between this intransitive subject and transitive object (1968:352). In addition, however, Lyons (1968:356) introduced the term 'ideal ergative' to cover a radically new concept. This 'ideal ergative' is realized when there is the distinction of agent versus non-agent in the subject of an intransitive verb. Such a system would distinguish:

he moved (agentive)

him moved (non-agentive)

Lyons (1968:357) notes that this distinction is not actually realized in any 'languages which are traditionally described

as having an ergative construction.' It is curious that in Chafe (1970b:232) there is a description in which the Onondaga ergative is characterized as 'agentive,' whereas in a footnote he concedes that this concept of 'ergative' is not the only one found.

Palmatier (1972:53) has continued this association of ergative and causative in the definition found in his glossary, wherein the ergative construction is defined as:

> Causative, referring to the syntactic relation that holds between a sentence like 'The raft moved' and 'Huck moved the raft,' in which 'Huck' is the 'ergative' subject---agent or cause of the action.

In a sense Anderson (1968:13) completes the circle when he states: 'I want to suggest that we extend the notion of ergative to encompass all instances of simple "agent-action" "transitive" verbs.' Thus we are nearly back at the idea that the ergative is the subject of a transitive verb. Anderson (1968:13) has also added a terminological digression by using 'ergative' as a semantic feature. Thus in 'he polishes well' and 'the cream polishes well' both 'he' and 'cream' are designated '+ergative.'

It is natural that the variety of definitions and number of systems to which 'ergative' has been applied would lead to a backlash. Wilbur (1970a:416) charges that 'ergative' has become a 'grabbag term for a number of not necessarily related phenomena.' He later (1970a:424) calls 'ergative' a 'pernicious term' and suggests that we 'perform a radical therapeutic operation and remove it once and for all from our linguistic vocabulary.' Although his paper is essentially a

caustic quibbling over terminology [it is ironic that in the same year Wilbur 1970b introduces the term 'pseudo-ergative' in speaking of a class of Basque verbs], he is right in saying that the use of 'ergative' has implied a homogeneity among such systems associated with the term.

Alleged primitiveness of ergative languages

Mauthner (1913:4) made the famous claim that, 'Hätte Aristoteles Chinesisch oder Dakotaisch gesprochen, er hätte zu einer ganz anderen Logik gelangen müssen, oder doch zu einer ganz anderen Kategorienlehre.' The fascination that the ergative construction has had is derived from the idea that languages with such constructions might be associated with a differing mentality, an opposed 'Weltanschauung.' Stemming from Humboldt's linguistic relativity, not only different but inferior mentalities have been attributed to speakers of ergative languages. An attack on the hypothesis of primitive languages is determinant upon the possibility of language evolution. It can be seen that many of the arguments in support of primitive languages border on the absurd, and it will appear that such an evolution of language is impossible to prove. Its doubtful existence appears at best a kind of intuitive conjecture.

The origin of the ergative construction was explained by the belief that for the 'primitieve taalgevoel' ('primitive linguistic feeling') 'the actual agent is a hidden power' (Uhlenbeck 1916:213). In a similar vein, 'Savage man apparently feels that most events are not due to his own volition' (Entwistle 1953:214), and, 'La langue est l'expression

de l'esprit humain, et l'homme, à un stade où son développement spirituel est encore peu avancé se sent un instrument docile, à la merci de la nature toute-puissante' (Erichsen 1944:69).

The reasoning was that the animate agent is not the subject since it is not the original agent; on the other hand, the object always bears the brunt of the action---here there is no intermediary and it is therefore the unmarked case. This is the supposed explanation, then, as to why the ergative case so frequently is morphologically similar to the instrumental. The ergative is really only a secondary agent. Since the original agent (presumably unmarked) is absent, unmarkedness is given to the patient.

The idea of nature as the primary agent (and hence the missing but real subject of the sentence) was given a sociological formalization by the controversial Lévy-Bruhl, who became noted for his 'prelogical thought' attributed to primitive man. Even in introducing the term he did not conceive of such a distinction between the thought of primitive and modern man for which he was subsequently attacked. In his posthumous 'Carnets' he refuted the term 'prelogical thought,' stating that the logical structure of the mind was always identical. As he explained, 'Il y a une mentalité mystique plus marquée et plus facilement observable chez les "primitifs" que dans nos sociétés, mais présente dans tout esprit humain' (1949:131). He still maintained that the primitive mind emphasized the affected meaning of symbols, what he called 'participation.'

As Cazeneuve (1972:5) explains, 'participation' means that 'things can be at the same time themselves and something else . . . .' In any action 'what for us is a true cause is for primitive man merely an event involving mystical forces (1972:6), or even that the 'action of supernatural forces is a prime datum in their [primitive people's] perception' (1972:7).

The encountering of ergative languages among peoples from primitive cultures led to conjecture that language evolved from ergative-absolutive to nominative-accusative, i.e., that the former is more 'primitive.' The speculation that Indo-European evolved from an ergative system reinforced this belief. To Uhlenbeck the presence of merely the transitive-intransitive contrast was a 'survivance du temps jadis ayant une mentalité archaïque (1948:72). According to Uhlenbeck, then, languages like cultures could be classified as 'primitive,'

> de même que le droit, l'art, la magie, la religion, le groupement social, etc. . . . reflètent la mentalité collective de certains groupes humains à certaines époques, les catégories grammaticales reflètent également certaines mentalités collectives (1948:72).

Sommerfelt's analysis (1938) of the Aranda (Australia), whose language he termed 'archaïque,' was influential enough that Laycock 1960 felt compelled to condemn it in a review 'twenty years after.' Laycock (1960:27) complained that Sommerfelt had attempted 'to arrange the language to fit the society.' Entwistle, after reading Sommerfelt, was encouraged to state that the sound system used by the Aranda was 'feebly organized' and that 'words as such do not exist but there are embryonic words . . . (1953:19).

On the subject of evolution in language Martinet (1962:72-73) stated:

> We might, for instance, assume that on a certain cultural and economic level we stand a good chance of coming across what has been called an ergative construction. On another level, which we might consider more advanced, the ergative construction will probably have given way to an active-passive verbal opposition . . . . Communication begins with a first analysis of experience in the frame of the morphosyntactic pattern of the language, and the way this first analysis is performed seems far more fundamental than the materials which are made use of for its transmission to other members of the community.

It was Tesnière's belief that the ergative language was a 'type très archaïque (1965:112). Marr believed that the ergative languages of the Caucasus were in the third stage of evolution (the so-called 'stadial theory') as opposed to Indo-European in the fourth stage; the unfortunate Chinese were placed back in the first. These stages were largely determined by synthetic, agglutinative, and inflectional typologies; in turn, these linguistic stages corresponded to thought stages, wherein we see the influence of Lévy-Bruhl (as claimed by Thomas 1957:117-134). Kuryłowicz 1946 denounced this stadial theory by showing the reversibility of both agentive (anti-passive) and passive transformations, which he termed merely 'stylistic.'

Marr 1925 also suggested that the 'passive' aorist construction (speaking of Georgian) was prompted by the social situation which made the agent in reality a sufferer [mentioned by Čikobava (1967:25)]. There has even been a claim that ergative languages are representative of feminine-oriented, hence 'passive' cultures (van Ginneken 1939:91-92 [quoted by Fillmore 1968:60]).

Brandenstein, in speaking of the change from ergative-absolutive to nominative-accusative in Proto-Indo-European, suggested that such a transformation was the result 'of a change to more individualistic thinking' (1967:4). An ergative language reflected a 'persistingly impersonal society.' He further stated that a 'trend back to a PVC [Passive Verbal Concept] could be a lingopsychic indicator of a looming social reversion' (1967:5).

The argument over evolution in language is an old one. Brosnahan (1960:236) argued:

> It would seem that the bulk of changes in a language over a period . . . contribute to the processes of advance and adaptation which would seem to be inseparable from the evolution of a language.

To continue the summation, the opposing view is from Greenberg (1967:65), who argued that 'it is not language as such which evolves but communication in general' and that,

> It appears that natural languages are all very much on the same level as far as efficiency is concerned [since] a comparative measure of efficiency which includes all relevant phonological, grammatical, and semantic aspects has never been worked out, and, in view of the complexity of each aspect and the disparity among them, it does not appear very likely that one can be developed.

The active-passive debate

A heated debate as to the active or passive nature of the ergative construction was launched by Schuchardt 1896, who however was most certainly not the first to suggest the passive nature of the ergative. Von der Gabelentz 1861, Pott 1873, Winkler 1887, Müller 1887, and Stempf 1890 had

suggested passive interpretations for the ergative. Müller (1887.3.2:7), for example, considered the Basque verb 'ein echtes Passivum' and the transitive subject 'ein unzweifelhafter Instrumental.' In his many monographs on Caucasian languages the Baron Uslar had considered the ergative a passive construction.

It was Schuchardt's thesis that the construction was not only passive but also in some instances intransitive. One might just as well say 'ich schreibe mit dem Brief' as 'von mir wird der Brief geschrieben' (1896:23). Schuchardt (1896:81) also stated that the Georgian verb was essentially passive, since the aorist form is customarily the root [unfortunately for the theory there are a number of exceptions]. The present-marking suffixes consequently were to be considered active markers (since there is no ergative associated with the Georgian present tense).

Uhlenbeck's passive interpretation (1916), an article as famous as Schuchardt's polemic, attempted to prove that there were many instances of passive verbs among American Indian languages. He cited (1) examples where there is a morphological similarity between active and passive (as in Algonkian); (2) verb stems (irrespective of the pronominal system) which are determined by absolutive complements (e.g., Na-Dene); and (3) ergative and absolutive pronominal affixes (especially in Siouan). Erichsen 1944, who preferred the passive-with-instrumental approach, merely reaffirmed Uhlenbeck's concept. She thus translated the Eskimo sentence

'An

'angutip netseq toqúpâ' ('the hunter kills the seal') as 'par l'intermédiaire du chasseur le phoque étant tué.'

A contemporary throwback is found in Hale's viewpoint (1970) that the ergative construction is a nominative-accusative language with an obligatory passive transformation. Like Hale, Comrie (1973:252) also appears to favor the idea that 'diachronically the ergative is a passive made obligatory.' Silverstein (1973:?) comments that Hale merely 'resuscitates the old Schuchardt-Uhlenbeck theory.' While development of an obligatory passive can be held responsible for the presence of some ergative constructions, it is definitely not the basis for all such phenomena.

It is important to note that native speakers and linguists more thoroughly familiar with ergative languages have not been in agreement with the passive viewpoint. Thus Schuchardt was immediately criticized by Vinson 1895, in respect to Basque. Lafitte 1931 and Naert 1956 also repudiated the passive theory for Basque. On the other hand, Lafon, this century's great scholar of Basque (yet not a native speaker), believed in the passive verb for Basque (e.g., Lafon 1954).

The chief adversary of Schuchardt (and later Uhlenbeck) was Finck 1905, 1907, who refused to consider the construction a passive, calling it instead a dative construction. Thus Finck (1905:285-286) would translate Eskimo 'teriangniap orssok takuvâ' ('the fox saw the bacon') as 'der Speck erscheint dem Fuchs.' (He also suggested 'die Speckerscheinung ist des Fuchses.') He translated

the phrase 'teriangniap crssua' ('the fox's bacon') as 'dem Fuchs sein Speck.' Kleinschmidt (1851:176-177) too had suggested that the Eskimo ergative resembled the German dative. Thus, although considered active, the ergative was still not seen as a nominative subject.

Also siding with Finck against the passive was Schnorr von Carolsfeld 1934, who argued that the 'transitive' was really an intransitive with an instrumental. Sapir's critical review (1917) of Uhlenbeck 1916 includes the comment that the latter had failed to differentiate transitive/intransitive from active/inactive. Also against the passive interpretation was Trombetti (1923:281), who argued that to be passive it must also have an active; it was Trombetti's opinion (1923:265) that the ergative suffix was an emphatic marker. Brosset 1837 and Tagliavini 1937 also considered the ergative an emphatic (speaking of the Georgian ergative).

In response to Trombetti 1923, Schuchardt (1925:34) stated that, 'Der Baskische Passivismus beruht auf dem allgemeinen Indifferentismus des nackten Verbs.' Although Schuchardt was speaking only of the original diathesis, it is this 'indifference' of the verb, rather than the passive notion, which began to receive more attention.

A compromise appeared when Sommerfelt (1937:185) suggested that 'la racine verbale géorgienne . . . n'exprime que l'action verbale pure et simple.' As such, the verb is neither transitive nor intransitive but instead is in apposition to the nouns, as in 'the man, he runs.' Vogt 1950 points out the polypersonal nature---in fact, the insularity---of the

Georgian verb, suggesting that the terms 'active' and 'passive' mean relatively little in Georgian.

Most recent scholars have continued to look upon many ergative constructions as essentially 'indifferent' to their complements. Čikobava 1967 and Tchekhoff 1972 (respectively with regard to Georgian and Avar) emphasize that the verb is bidirectional; yet while it looks in two directions, it is in a sense independent. Čikobava 1967 says that the verb cannot be called either active or passive since it does not distinguish two voices, thus improving on Trombetti's statement (above). According to Tchekhoff (1973:255), 'L'essential de la construction ergative, c'est la non-orientation du verb par rapport à son/ses déterminant/s.' Thus, 'un énoncé en construction ergative ne dit pas "le poisson mange," pas plus qu'il ne dit "le poisson est mangé."' There is merely a juxtaposition or parataxis of noun and verb: 'fish' and 'the action of eating.' Martinet 1958 had earlier emphasized this viewpoint in respect to Basque.

Variety of ergative phenomena

The cause of such variant definitions and interpretations appears quite naturally to be the fact that 'ergative' has encompassed such a variety of phenomena from unrelated languages. It seems pointless to speak of a single origin of the ergative or to state that the ergative as a single phenomenon is active, passive, or neutral. It is apparent that some ergative constructions do result

historically from an obligatory passive transformation (see especially Hohepa 1969). It is equally apparent that others have no verb diathesis whatsoever.

A further elucidation of the ergative phenomena is found in an important article by Silverstein 1973, in which the term 'split system' is used to designate the presence of both nominative-accusative and ergative-absolutive constructions within a language. Differentiation of such systems is found according to tense (Georgian, Tibetan, Mayan, Burushaski, Indic languages), embedded versus unembedded clauses (Mayan, Ngaluma-Yintjipaṇṭi), and the pronominal system (either within such or between nominal and pronominal systems; instances of such are extremely common). In the last as well as in respect to a semantic feature differentiation Silverstein has noted a hierarchy in the use of the ergative which is in accordance with markedness theory, e.g., the ergative may be excluded respectively for proper names (Mabuiag) and animates (Hittite); thus relatively rarer forms occurring as transitive subjects must be marked.

In Avar (NE Caucasus) in addition to the ergative case the subject may be found in the dative or locative (respectively with '-ol'-' ('to love') and '-iX-' ('to see'). Rather than 'subject' and 'object' (correctly used these terms should be placed in quotations) verbs in such languages appear to require semantically governed sets of relationships with numerous cases. In German 'mir ist etwas aus der Hand gefallen' the dative construction appears as a peripheral example; in Georgian or Avar the extent of such anomalies makes it difficult to

determine either a nominative-accusative or ergative-absolutive language. A language such as Avar has been termed 'ergative' merely because the 'object' (as translated into a Western IE language) is customarily placed in the absolutive.

In addition to such examples of semantic differentiation the case of the subject may be based not on the transitive-intransitive nature of the sentence but rather on whether the action is ±volitional (Tibetan, Siouan, Bats---the last in the NE Caucasus), ±emphatic (Kâte, Tibetan, Police Motu, and some Polynesian languages), and ±movement (a number of American Indian languages). Informants of two Lakhota (Siouan) dialects were amused at each other's use of pronominal prefixes to the verb '-hixpaye' ('to fall'); to one informant the other's use of an ergative prefix meant that 'falling' was a volitional act! In some languages the nature of the action (±volitional or ±movement) may determine the subject case; in other languages the verb itself may determine the subject case.

Bearing in mind such typical transitive and intransitive sentences as respectively 'Harry killed his grandmother' and 'his grandmother was rich,' it will be noted that a higher percentage of emphatic, movement, and volitional ergatives is still more likely to be found as the transitive rather than intransitive subject. Languages in which the 'subject' case is semantically determined might be called 'near ergative.' The term 'semantic ergative' is tenuously suggested here for such near ergatives and thus

for any language with the frequent association of transitive object and intransitive subject and yet having the 'subject' case determined by the semantic nature of the verb or 'subject' noun. In turn this semantic ergative may be split according to the syntactic criteria discussed by Silverstein.

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